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ABSTRACT

West Texas State University made provisions for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who already had an academic knowledge of English, some facility in conversational English, and basic knowledge of some disciplines. What these students needed was the ability to develop logically a research paper and practice in using the vocabulary of their fields of study. To meet this need, professors from various disciplines assisted in developing a tape-book which included vocabulary, essays, and a program of writing and recording by the student. A program of independent study, group work, and writing evolved in which the students were learning American rules of rhetoric primarily in their chosen field of concentration. The second semester course was developed using much the same format, but the content dealt with vocabulary and methods of literary criticism. In addition to these courses, an upper-level course has been introduced to help students produce such specialized written forms as the "vita," reports, various kinds of applications, letters, book reviews, and in some cases, articles for publication. (AMH)

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Address to the Mini-plenary session of EFL/SIG at TESOL '80, San Francisco

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MAINSTREAMING THE EFL STUDENT INTO THE AMIERICAN COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

Someone not acquainted with what you and I actually do might think, judging by the title of my paper, that I have a background in social work or special education. I do, indeed--as do all of us--but not quite in the conventional sense. All of us do social as well as academic work, and certainly all of us are heart-and-head deep in the most special kind of education.

I should like to take a short running start before I leap into the specifics of purpose and method in the mainstreaming of the International student. What I shall say is most applicable to those of us in the mid-sized college or university with a majority of International students who are already fairly well equipped to handle the language. For us, with our limited budgets and relatively small faculties, the language school with its more-or-less-elaborate physical plant and personnel is not a possibility. But we recognize the inutility of the "regular" Freshman English classes in providing for the special needs of the International student. Also, we do want to offer courses with full credit, since credit hours are increasingly expensive and time seems to grow shorter and shorter. By way of introduction, I should like to

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sketch in the case-histories (there I go again!) of two typical young people.

All of us recognize John Shia--bright, ambitious, hard-working, mature. He knows the United States through hundreds of movies, TV shows, and stage plays; he has read Mother Goose rhymes, adaptations of Shakespeare, Hemingway, and Vonnegut; he is a master of the quick smile and the sympathetic laugh.

But when he goes into a "regular" class in American History, for instance, he cannot follow the half-finished sentences in the rapid-fire regional accent of his professor. He knows the terms and the events that appear on the board--his scores in American History are high. But how they fit into the professor's remarks or indeed what the remarks have been, he has no idea. His written work--though full of odd errors--is so factually accurate that Professor Blank remains unaware that the class itself is a vast wasteland for John.

Elizabeth Kintay's problem is different. She has spent two years in an American high school in Western Africa. She is hip to all the current slang; she understands perfectly Dr. Smith's references to Paradise Lost and Of Things Remembered. She knows what satire is and can recognize a sonnet at forty paces--or pages. She can, by allowing plenty of time for reading, understand and discuss what the author is "trying to say."

But when Elizabeth tries to "say" it on paper, she shares the

difficulty of most native speakers: she has had so little practice in written discourse that she has no idea how to sustain a discussion, organize a paper, or research a topic through several sources. This difficulty she shares also with John. Neither has been trained to produce reasoned discourse in the logical mode.

The traditional EFL course, while it is indispensible for the student who has had little formal training in English, is not effective in solving John and Elizabeth's problems. Both of them have an academic knowledge of grammar, syntax, and many idiomatic expressions. Both of them have studied literature, at least one of the sciences, world history, and perhaps psychology and economics. They know a great many facts. But in a class where all International students are learning the same vocabulary of social interaction, grammatical forms, and syntactical patterns, John and Elizabeth are losing time. Much of what the class learns, they already know or would learn anyway. The tapes help the student "hear" the casual diction of his professors. The workbook gives the student practice in writing sentences and paragraphs from the models in which the subject-matter is "the office" or "the parking lot" or "the party." But while John and Elizabeth are learning the vocabulary and grammar of these situations, they are steadily losing ground in English literature, history and agri-business.

It is my experience and that of many of my EFL students that what they need most is a course that will include the vocabulary and syntax of the classes in which they are attempting to compete with

native speakers--not just in acquiring the content of text-books, not just in comprehending the lecture or class discussion--but in producing written forms that require vocabulary imbedded in discourse. If the student can learn the progressive tense in such phrases as "are parking the car" or "was typing the paper," for instance, how much more relevant and profitable it will be for him to learn it in "is filing the case history" or "has been preparing the cost analysis!" If he can learn to write a paragraph incorporating the vocabulary of the cross-town bus ride, he can as readily learn to write one incorporating the vocabulary of the political process in America.

And if in his traditional EFL course he goes no farther than the paragraph in organizing his ideas, he again has lost the early opportunity to learn the American style of the logical paper--a matter of rhetoric which is not always part of the typical curriculum, either in the United States or abroad. The relatively independent study of the American freshman has not as a rule been part of his background, so the paper logically developed from the student's own thesis has had little or no place in his class work.

So much for the concepts--the theoretical bases of mainstreaming. I feel reasonably sure that all of us entertain a basic agreement in this area. Now, I should like to go on to the preceptive aspect--the practical application of necessary traditional teaching procedures to the specific situation in our own EFL classes at West Texas State University.

Clearly, a course that will prepare the EFL student for sophomore work in university needs to be planned and tailored for the individual student. But how can the usual personnel and resources of the English department provide such a course? Where are there texts and materials available to even the creative classroom teacher? And what sort of lab or lab equipment can be flexible enough to serve the individual student in a class of fifteen or twenty?

At WT we faced these questions and many more--or rather, I faced them, since the classes for our International students were given to me. My response was to begin to shout for help. Luckily, both classes and the International student population at WT are small enough that professors in departments other than English are personally acquainted with their EFL students and feel concerned about them. Since the professors--particularly those in industrial engineering, agriculture, the sciences, accounting, and marketing--are often in close contact with businessmen, industrialists, and other prospective employers, they really care whether John Shia and Elizabeth Kintay are achieving their potential as they prepare for a job or a career. If John or Elizabeth cannot communicate easily, if their writing of papers, reports, or simply answers to essay questions is below standard, their instructors worry about it.

Since I was aware of this concern, I set up appointments with my colleagues in other departments and asked for help in developing cassette tapes and tapesheets, incorporating the vocabulary of the

course content in their classes for the first two or three weeks of the semester. They were wonderfully cooperative. Some, before I had the opportunity to ask, volunteered to tape the vocabulary part of the typical tape sheet, so that the student would be able to hear it in his professor's own voice--could indeed play the tape over and over again until the printed or written word and the spoken word came into focus. The chairman of the art department sent terms used in discussing various media and techniques, sorted according to categories, and recorded in his big, enthusiastic voice for the benefit of his one Japanese student.

Now, I had the nucleus of my first-semester tapebook. I knew that the vocabulary of rhetoric alone would only begin to solve the problems. There must be essays, using the vocabulary, incorporating the necessary grammatical and syntactical points, providing a number of phrases demonstrating the various uses of the individual words, and a program of writing and recording on the part of the student that would give all of us a gauge of his progress.

As I began to visualize this procedure in operation, I saw at length how useless the traditional lab set-up would be. A console would not be practical because it would be seldom that all the students would listen or record at the same time. In fact, when I tried using one of the modern language lab , the faults were immediately apparent: the students were relatively isolated, but lacked a freedom that I saw they should have. The equipment finally resolved itself into

individual cassette recorders with ear phones and converter mikes. A recorder was issued to each student who did not already have his own, along with enough tapes to record and preserve his work for the semester. The tapes from the professors were produced for the student, but they remained the property of the lab. The master tapes for the tapebook that I had developed for my own English classes were reproduced for each student. With their sometimes horrendous schedules, there is simply not another hour in the day for a conventional lab, but there is time daily for independent work with the master tapes and the recorders.

The format that evolved from the raw materials--tapebook, recorder, master tape, and student tape is the following: the student is given at the first of each lesson a vocabulary of words needed to discuss the writing of a theme based on a particular rhetorical pattern. Then the student is given a short essay explaining the mechanics of the theme of definition, the analysis, the part-to- whole, the whole-to-part, and other types of logical development. He is provided with phrases that require him to use these various devices in sentences of his own making. Then he is asked to write a paragraph of his own, repeating in his own words the principles set forth in the essay. So far, this procedure is not different from that of many good EFL courses, except for the kind of vocabulary the student uses and the situation or topic that forms the basis for his own writing.

But now the student performs several steps that I have found

significant to his improvement: 1)after listening carefully to the tape on which his teacher has recorded the vocabulary and the essay, the student himself records the vocabulary on his own cassette tape; 2) he records his own writing once, then again if he wishes to correct or improve his pronunciation and inflection; 3) he hands in his writing for marking by his instructor; 4) he subsequently re-writes, correcting errors according to rules and conventions explained in the lessons on punctuation and sentence structure found in the Handbook; and 5) he hands it in for a grade. The instructor evaluates the student's recording on a form especially developed for that purpose, noting the pronunciation difficulties and recording his or her own comments at the end of the student's taped lesson.

Two things are important here: the student has seen and heard a word several times, not only as a single entity, but also imbedded in discourse, with its attendant forms and differing emphases; and he himself writes sentences, then himself imbedding them in discourse of his devising. Finally, he reproduces both words and discourse in his own voice, recording them on tapes that will be added to and preserved in his file box. These tapes will serve as reference material for both teacher and student as a record of his progress and his weaknesses.

So much for a description of the informal lab procedures. Now, I would like to direct your attention to the format for the two one-hour class periods when all the students meet and work together: in the first hour, the instructor presents the usual material in a freshman course

in composition and rhetoric as it has been adapted on the tapesheet, answering questions encouraging the use of the dictionary, calling for class responses, but no individual ones; in the second hour-long class period, the instructor reviews the rhetoric tapesheet, introduces the lab sheet, and shows how the rhetoric tapesheet relates to the lab tapesheet, occasionally calling for an oral response whenever a student seems ready to attempt it. Again, the students hear the words, both separately and in discourse, before they are asked to make even a group response.

The foregoing procedures are crowned by a similarly developed segment on THE PAPER. Before this latter study can be effective, it seems to me that there must be a certain amount of trust and discipline--rapport, perhaps--built up in the class. It is often very difficult for some International students to grasp or accept the American pattern of logical development. They must have also a considerable body of information as well as the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax to sustain the writing of a formal paper. This kind of assignment is best done, we have found, in a workshop situation with constant help and supervision by the instructor. The student needs to see how this paper-writing affects the rest of his work in classes other than English. So the subject matter of the paper is that of his major subject. I have found that departmental advisors are enthusiastic about this kind of assignment and are very willing to suggest topics that will provide good background for their advisees. Since

this is not a full-scale research paper, the topics are necessarily limited in scope, allowing the students only six to eight pages in which to develop a thesis, provide evidence, and draw a conclusion. But the experience of bringing to bear on a topic all the rhetorical devices covered by the tapebook is invaluable to the student when "the paper" is assigned in other classes. He already knows how to define, to analyze, and so forth. Applying those processes to another topic becomes, if not a matter of routine, at least a comfortingly familiar thing.

In the second semester, when Freshman English traditionally introduces literature, the EFL student often finds himself at a disadvantage again--not because he lacks a background in world literature or the ability to translate rapidly from English to his own language and back again, but because he does not know the vocabulary of literary analysis, which will become increasingly important in the study of third-semester or Sophomore English.

So at WT we have developed another tapebook and tapes which treat the subject of literary analysis or criticism. Since not all the students in a given class will be reading on the same level, the tapebook develops general principles, which may be applied to any work the teacher may wish to assign. Again, the procedure is the same as in the first semester. The student makes the word his own by following a specific program of hearing, seeing, and writing before saying, then having his work evaluated by the instructor on the tape immediately

All of the foregoing applies to the entering Freshman or to the transfer student whose transcript shows unsatisfactory records in Freshman English. At WT, we use the Michigan Language Test battery to place students who, as the battery shows, need remedial work. But now we come to another category of students who are neglected in many institutions, as one of the Colloquia and many of the workshops and presentations show: the upper-level or graduate student who simply needs supervision or reinforcement. For these students, we have instituted a third course, which they may take once for undergraduate and once for graduate credit.

This is a course with two goals: to help students achieve as high a level as possible in writing for general purposes and to produce such specialized written forms as the vita, the report, the various kinds of applications, letters, book-reviews, research papers in different fields, and in some cases, articles for publication. The reading in this course is in the professional journals, general magazines--such as FORTUNE or HARPERS--books, and scholarly papers in the students' own disciplines.

The text for this course has developed out of my thirty years' experience working with editors. As the introduction states, this is a book that does not--like the usual English text--tell the writer what he ought to know, but what he wants to know in order to make his writing clear, coherent, and stysistically consistent within the requirements of his field.

requirements of his field.

The first two-thirds of the course presents again on a more sophisticated level the principles developed in the Freshman Rhetoric, introducing methods of analyzing the best examples of writing in the students' own fields with the purpose of emulating structure, style, and techniques in their writing. The Handbook in this text is fuller and provides more examples from many disciplines than the Freshman Tapebook includes. There is a section on First-Aid for Composition: how to focus and predict in a thesis or introductory paragraph; how to construct an interesting beginning; various devices for achieving coherence; how to avoid a number of pitfalls; and how to use transitional techniques and devices to achieve logical progression. There is a section on reading--sometimes on how to avoid reading!--to get the most pertinent information in the shortest length of time. And there are other features.

In this class, the student writes every class period--actually, a respectable amount of writing in any type of class. But his focus is upon producing the kind of writing under consideration for that day's assignment--the article (formal or informal), the project report, the book review, etc. Departmental advisors are delighted with the opportunity to recommend reading material. And, when the students themselves begin to read to each other from their own work, they too are delighted to discover two things: the universality of good, clear, emphatic prose and the exciting variety of subjects and courses offered

by the university. They begin to see something that I consider essential to the educated person--what Bronowski called the "similarities in unlike things."

The final third of this course consists of a workshop format: students choose from among a list of projects, such as articles, book reviews, interviews, research (including theses for graduate students), and papers based upon hypotheses. They contract for three of these--except in the case of graduate students who are at work on theses. They set their own deadlines and accept penalties for late work.

Now it is true that not every student achieves excellence in composition. But all of them advance toward it, and that is far better than muddling along in dread and error!

I wish at this point to acknowledge my debt to the late Dr. Edward Zittler, of Giesen, Germany, whose last work was in this direction. And closer to home in both time and space, have been the conferences, workshops, and colloquia with Allis Bens, Joan Moreley, Mary Bruder, Joyce Zuck, Holly Jacobs, and Ruth Crymes, whose cheerful support and counsel none of us will ever cease to miss. Through their enthusiasm and expertise, my own convictions have been confirmed and my resolve stiffened to follow the above ideas to their practical application.

Believe me, it wasn't easy! But the result has been that I have reached a number of conclusions: in the first place, the Freshman students in my classes have become more responsible for their own

progress than in times past, because they have a means of checking their journey through this linguistic jungle called English. At the very least, they have had the opportunity to acquire some of the vocabulary of some of their courses while learning or reinforcing their knowledge of how the language works. The instructor has an instant replay of the students' work at any period of their progress, thus keeping current with each student's problems. The students themselves can go back or forward at will, hurry or move deliberately, without having to consider the pace of the class. And yet for two hours a week, they have the support and comraderie of others who share similar trials and triumphs. And in both Freshman and upper-level classes, they have also worked with a variety of people who are all concerned about their progress and who have given all of them a sense of belonging to the college or university.

I think that perhaps the most valuable thing to come out of all this toil is the sense of the university fulfilling its purpose: to work--not as separate departments or schools--but as a single entity, bringing to bear all its resources, human and conceptual, upon the legitimate academic needs of these very special students, all the John Shias and Elizabeth Kintays present or to come.